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REG	Copy	Journal
TITLE: CLINICAL NEUROPHARMACOLOGY		
PUBLISHER/PLACE: Lippincott Williams & Wilkins Hagerstown, MD :		
VOLUME/ISSUE/PAGES: 1995 Apr;18(2):95-112 95-112		
DATE: 1995		
AUTHOR OF ARTICLE: Slavoski LA;Tunkel AR		
TITLE OF ARTICLE: THERAPY OF FUNGAL MENINGITIS.		
ISSN: 0362-5664		
OTHER NUMBERS/LETTERS: Unique ID.: 7607910		
28433694		
8635178		
SOURCE: PubMed		
MAX COST: \$4.00		
COPYRIGHT COMP.: Guidelines		
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## Review

# Therapy of Fungal Meningitis

Linda A. Slavoski and Allan R. Tunkel

Division of Infectious Diseases, Medical College of Pennsylvania,  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, U.S.A.

**Summary:** There has been an increase in recent years in the number of reported cases of meningitis and brain abscesses caused by fungi. This increase is due to the availability of better diagnostic techniques for fungal infections and the ever-increasing population of immunocompromised hosts (1,2). The patients most susceptible to invasive fungal infections include those with hematologic malignancies; those receiving hyperalimentation, corticosteroids, or cytotoxic drugs; transplant recipients; injection drug abusers; and those with the acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS). Although many fungi infect only immunologically impaired patients, some will infect normal hosts as well. The successful treatment of central nervous system (CNS) fungal infections is highly dependent on the underlying immune status of the host, as well as on the prompt initiation of appropriate antifungal therapy. However, the diagnosis of these infections may be difficult, and proper therapy often delayed. Furthermore, information on treatment regimens ranges from extensive, as in the case of cryptococcal meningitis, to scanty or nonexistent in the case of rare, opportunistic fungi. For >3 decades, the standard antifungal agent for the treatment of CNS fungal infections has been amphotericin B. However, the effectiveness of amphotericin B is often limited by poor CNS penetration, fungal resistance, and toxicity (3). Because of the problems associated with use of amphotericin B, newer azole antifungal agents have been developed, some of which are efficacious in the therapy of fungal meningitis. We give an overview of the antifungal agents currently available for clinical use and their utility in the treatment of fungal meningitis. **Key Words:** Antifungal—Amphotericin B—Meningitis.

## ANTIFUNGAL AGENTS

### Amphotericin B

Amphotericin B, the first commercially significant antifungal agent, has been available for >30 years. It is a by-product of the fermentation process of *Streptomyces nodosus*, first isolated at Squibb Laboratories in 1953 (4). Amphotericin B is a member of the polyene macrolide class of antibiotics and acts, at least in part, by binding irreversibly to ergosterol, a sterol present in the membrane of

Address correspondence and reprint requests to Dr. A. R. Tunkel, Division of Infectious Diseases, Medical College of Pennsylvania, 3300 Henry Avenue, Philadelphia, PA 19129, U.S.A.

sensitive fungi (3). This alters fungal membrane permeability, causing leakage of cell components and subsequent cell death. Other proposed mechanisms of action include oxidative damage and immunomodulation (5).

The pharmacokinetic properties of amphotericin B are summarized in Table 1 (6). After intravenous administration, amphotericin B becomes ~95% protein bound, primarily to lipoproteins, erythrocytes, and cholesterol. Cerebrospinal fluid (CSF) concentrations are thought to be only ~2-4% of simultaneous serum concentrations after intravenous administration (3). However, animal model data suggest that meningeal concentrations may be higher than CSF concentrations (7), which may account for the success of amphotericin B in the therapy of fungal meningitis. The metabolism of amphotericin B is poorly understood. Only a small percentage (3%) is excreted in the urine or bile. Serum concentrations are not influenced by the presence of hepatic or renal failure (8); hemodialysis does not generally reduce serum concentrations (9). Amphotericin B is usually administered by slow intravenous infusion over 2-6 h.

Unfortunately, amphotericin B is not without toxicity or adverse reactions. An acute reaction, usually in the form of rigors, may begin ~30-90 min after the start of the infusion, sometimes accompanied by hypoxemia, hypotension, or hypertension. Meperidine, given intravenously, has been shown to ameliorate the duration or severity of the rigors. In addition, intravenous hydrocortisone (25-50 mg) given before the amphotericin B infusion, or in the infusion, often diminishes the febrile reaction.

Renal failure is the most significant potential toxic effect of amphotericin B administration. Reversible impairment of renal function occurs early during the treatment and may occur in >80% of patients receiving therapy (3); return to pretreatment values may take up to several months. A therapeutic course of amphotericin B is usually followed by a permanent reduction in glomerular filtration rate, which appears to be unrelated to azotemia during therapy, but correlates with total dose (5). There is also a reduction in renal blood flow and impaired proximal and distal tubular reabsorption of electrolytes. The clinical manifestations include renal tubular acidosis, azotemia, oliguria, hypokalemia, and hypomagnesemia. Renal function does not deteriorate more often in renal transplant patients, diabetic patients, or those with preexisting renal impairment (10). Other effects of amphotericin B include thrombophlebitis and a normochromic, normocytic anemia; rarely, leukopenia, headache, anorexia, nausea, vomiting, myalgias, and arthralgias may occur. Intrathecal administration of amphotericin B may

TABLE 1. Selected pharmacologic properties of systemic antifungal agents<sup>a</sup>

Property	Amphotericin B	Flucytosine	Ketoconazole	Itraconazole	Fluconazole
Oral bioavailability (%)	<5	≥80	75	>70	>80
Protein binding (%)	91-95	4	99	>99	11
Terminal elimination half-life	15 days	3-6 h	7-10 h <sup>b</sup>	24-42 h <sup>b</sup>	22-31 h
Cerebrospinal fluid penetration (%)	2-4	>75	<10	<1	>70

<sup>a</sup> Adapted from reference 6.

<sup>b</sup> Longer terminal elimination half-lives are possible with large daily doses.

*Clin. Neuropharmacol.*, Vol. 18, No. 2, 1995

be required for treatment and has been associated with neuropathy, myelopathy (2).

Flucytosine is absorbed intact from the gastrointestinal tract on the enzyme converts flucytosine to 5-fluorodeoxyuride, which inhibits thymidylate synthetase (11).

The pharmacokinetics of flucytosine are similar to those of amphotericin B. Flucytosine is completely absorbed and is highly protein bound. It is excreted in the urine. CSF concentrations are low. The half-life of flucytosine is increased in patients with decreased renal function.

Flucytosine is used in combination with amphotericin B in patients with a creatinine clearance of >75 mg/kg/day. The dose is 50 mg/kg/day when receiving hemodialysis (12). Despite the toxicity, flucytosine should be maintained at a therapeutic level when flucytosine is used in combination with amphotericin B. Flucytosine causes neutropenia, leukopenia, and vomiting (12,13). The dose should be adjusted in patients with renal impairment and monitored twice daily during therapy to anticipate toxicity.

Flucytosine should be used with caution because fungi have developed resistance to therapy. Therefore, amphotericin B should be used in combination with flucytosine. Amphotericin B doses, treatment duration, and flucytosine resistance

The azole class of antifungal drugs, which includes fluconazole, itraconazole, and voriconazole, have a different chemical structure and mechanism of action.

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#### Systemic antifungal agents<sup>a</sup>

Conazole	Itraconazole	Fluconazole
75	>70	>80
99	>99	11
1 h <sup>b</sup>	24-42 h <sup>b</sup>	22-31 h
10	<1	>70

ses.

be required for therapy of certain causes of fungal meningitis (see the following) and has been associated with headache, delirium, arachnoiditis, vasculitis, radiculopathy, myelopathy, visual impairment, and meningitis (chemical or bacterial) (2).

#### Flucytosine

Flucytosine is the fluorine analog of the body constituent cytosine and is readily absorbed intact from the gastrointestinal tract. Its mechanism of action depends on the enzyme cytosine deaminase, which is found in susceptible fungi and converts flucytosine to the antimetabolite 5-fluorouracil, with subsequent conversion to 5-fluorodeoxyuridine monophosphate, a noncompetitive inhibitor of thymidylate synthetase (11). This interferes with fungal DNA synthesis.

The pharmacokinetic properties of flucytosine are summarized in Table 1 (6). Flucytosine is completely absorbed after oral administration, and there is negligible protein binding. Approximately 90% of the drug is excreted unchanged in the urine. CSF concentrations average 74% of simultaneous serum concentrations. The half-life of flucytosine in patients with normal renal function is 3-6 h; decreased renal function prolongs the half-life.

Flucytosine is usually administered as 150 mg/kg/day in four divided doses in patients with a creatinine clearance >50 ml/min. The total dose should be reduced to 75 mg/kg/day in patients with a creatinine clearance of 26-50 ml/min, and 37 mg/kg/day when the creatinine clearance is reduced to 13-25 ml/min. Patients receiving hemodialysis may be given a single dose of 37 mg/kg after each dialysis (12). Despite the adjustment in doses, serum concentrations must be followed and should be maintained at 50-100 µg/ml. Complications appear to be more frequent when flucytosine serum concentrations exceed 100-125 µg/ml and include thrombocytopenia, leukopenia, hepatic dysfunction, diarrhea, anorexia, nausea, and vomiting (12,13). Serum concentrations must be obtained (2 h after a dose) and dosing adjusted accordingly. It is recommended that the serum creatinine be monitored twice weekly, and the creatinine clearance calculated weekly during therapy to anticipate changes in serum flucytosine concentrations.

Flucytosine should never be given alone for the treatment of CNS infections because fungi have developed in vitro and in vivo resistance during single-drug therapy. Therefore, clinicians have generally used this drug in combination with amphotericin B. The additive effects of the two drugs allow use of lower amphotericin B doses, thereby causing less amphotericin B-related toxicity (12). Flucytosine resistance during combination therapy is rare.

#### Azole Antifungal Agents

The azole class of antifungal agents can be divided into two groups: the imidazoles, which include miconazole and ketoconazole; and the triazoles, which include fluconazole and itraconazole (6,14,15). All of these compounds are synthetic and structurally similar, with a five-member azole ring and a complex side

chain attached to one of the nitrogen atoms. Imidazole antifungal agents contain two nitrogen atoms within the five-member ring, whereas the triazoles contain three nitrogen atoms.

The antifungal effects of the azoles are targeted primarily at ergosterol, the main sterol of the fungal cell membrane (6). The azoles inhibit ergosterol synthesis through an interaction with C-14  $\alpha$ -demethylase, an enzyme dependent on cytochrome P-450, which is necessary for the conversion of lanosterol to ergosterol. The depletion of ergosterol alters membrane fluidity, as well as membrane permeability.

In general, the azole drugs have been well tolerated. Dose-related gastrointestinal symptoms are the most common side effects but rarely necessitate the discontinuation of therapy (6,14). Other adverse effects include headache, fever, fatigue, abdominal pain, and diarrhea; hypersensitivity reactions rarely occur. There is the potential for hepatic toxicity, which is seen more often with ketoconazole than with the other azole antifungal agents. Drug-drug interactions are another major concern and may be seen in patients receiving  $H_2$ -receptor antagonists, phenytoin, rifampin, cyclosporine, sulfonyleurea drugs, terfenadine, astemizole, or warfarin (16). The azoles receiving the most clinical attention are ketoconazole, fluconazole, and itraconazole; these are discussed in more detail subsequently.

#### Ketoconazole

Ketoconazole is available only for oral administration. It is a weak base that requires an acid environment for optimal oral absorption (6). Concomitant use of  $H_2$ -blocking agents, gastric surgery, or gastropathy associated with AIDS may reduce gastric acid secretion and therefore decrease absorption. Ketoconazole is extensively bound to plasma proteins, thus limiting the distribution of the drug. Penetration into the CSF is poor (Table 1); failure of ketoconazole treatment for fungal meningitis has occurred. Ketoconazole is metabolized in the liver, so dosage need not be adjusted for renal failure.

Side effects after therapy with ketoconazole include nausea, vomiting, hepatotoxicity, and endocrinologic toxicity (6). Transient elevations in serum transaminases and alkaline phosphatase may occur but usually return to normal during treatment. Clinical hepatitis has been reported; hepatotoxicity is usually reversible when the drug is discontinued, however. The main difference in potential toxicity between ketoconazole and the newer azoles is its effect on steroidogenesis. Ketoconazole can reversibly inhibit the synthesis of adrenal and gonadal steroid hormones by inhibiting the cytochrome P-450 enzymes necessary for their synthesis, resulting in disturbances such as gynecomastia, oligospermia, impotence, menstrual irregularities, and occasionally, adrenal insufficiency.

#### Fluconazole

Fluconazole is available in both oral and intravenous formulations. The absorption of oral fluconazole is not altered by the presence of food or by gastric acidity,

and peak plasma (6,17). In contrast to ketoconazole, fluconazole in most cases requires low concentrations. It is administered in doses of 200 mg daily to patients with glomerular disease, which reduces the serum concentration (14). The unique feature of fluconazole is its penetration into CSF. It has a low plasma peak plasma concentration, long half-life, high degree of penetration, and is used for the treatment of fungal infections.

Side effects of fluconazole include nausea and vomiting, and include nausea and vomiting, aminases; hepatic

Itraconazole is a weak base requiring an acid environment for optimal bioavailability. Once absorbed, it is extensively metabolized with a half-life of 24-42 hours. It can be adjusted for renal failure. Ketoconazole has relatively poor penetration into the meninges.

Side effects of itraconazole include nausea, vomiting, elevated serum transaminases, hypertension, and pregnancy, except for drug interactions with

The success of fluconazole in treating underlying immunosuppression is successful in patients with more likely to be

azole antifungal agents contain ergosterol, whereas the triazoles contain

primarily at ergosterol, the main target is inhibit ergosterol synthesis by an enzyme dependent on cyclization of lanosterol to ergosterol. Fluconazole, as well as membrane per-

meability. Dose-related gastrointestinal side effects rarely necessitate the discontinuation. Side effects include headache, fever, allergic reactions rarely occur. Side effects are seen more often with ketoconazole. Drug-drug interactions are common in patients receiving  $H_2$ -receptor antagonist drugs, terfenadine, astemizole. Most clinical attention are ketoconazole discussed in more detail sub-

absorption. It is a weak base that requires acid environment for optimal oral absorption (6). Concomitant use of drugs associated with AIDS may decrease absorption. Ketoconazole is not in the distribution of the drug. Side effects of ketoconazole treatment for patients metabolized in the liver, so dosage

include nausea, vomiting, hepatotoxicity, elevations in serum transaminases usually return to normal during treatment. Atotoxicity is usually reversible. A main difference in potential side effects is its effect on steroidogenesis of adrenal and gonadal enzymes necessary for their synthesis. Gastritis, oligospermia, impotence, renal insufficiency.

Various formulations. The absorption is affected by food or by gastric acidity,

and peak plasma concentrations are reached within 1 to 2 h after administration (6,17). In contrast to the other azole antifungals that are highly bound, plasma protein binding of fluconazole is low (~11%). Therefore, concentrations of fluconazole in most body tissues and fluids exceed 50% of the corresponding plasma concentrations. The primary route of elimination is renal, with ~80% of the administered dose being excreted in the urine. The dose should be reduced in patients with glomerular filtration rates <50 ml/min. Hemodialysis for 3 h generally reduces the serum concentration by 50%; the drug is also removed by peritoneal dialysis (14). The mean half-life ranges from 21 to 31 h (Table 1). The distinguishing feature of fluconazole that separates it from other azoles is its good penetration into CSF. Peak CSF concentrations of fluconazole are 70–90% of simultaneous peak plasma concentrations (18). The good absorption after oral dosing, long half-life, high volume of distribution, low level of protein binding, and high degree of penetration into CSF make fluconazole a potentially good agent for the treatment of fungal meningitis (19).

Side effects of fluconazole have been less than those noted with ketoconazole and include nausea, vomiting, rash, and asymptomatic elevations of serum transaminases; hepatitis is rare.

#### *Itraconazole*

Itraconazole is available only for oral administration and, like ketoconazole, is a weak base requiring an acid environment for optimal oral absorption (6,20). The bioavailability of itraconazole is two to three times higher when taken with food. Once absorbed, itraconazole becomes highly bound to plasma proteins and is extensively metabolized in the liver, although its half-life at steady-state conditions is 24–42 h. Because little drug is excreted in the urine, the dosage need not be adjusted for patients with renal impairment or those receiving dialysis. Itraconazole has relatively poor penetration into CSF (Table 1), but successful treatment of certain CNS fungal infections suggests that penetration of itraconazole into the meninges is more important than actual CSF penetration (see the following).

Side effects reported with itraconazole are mainly gastrointestinal and include nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, headache, and dizziness (6,20). Hypokalemia, elevated serum transaminases, elevated alkaline phosphatase, pedal edema, and hypertension have also been reported. Itraconazole is contraindicated in pregnancy, except for therapy of life-threatening fungal infections. The drug-drug interactions with itraconazole are similar to those seen with ketoconazole.

#### FUNGAL PATHOGENS

The successful treatment of CNS fungal infections is highly dependent on the underlying immune status of the host. Therapy, in most cases, is more likely to be successful in patients who are only temporarily immunosuppressed, as compared to patients with persistence of their underlying immune deficits. Therapy is also more likely to be successful if begun early in the course of infection. However, the

diagnosis of these infections is often difficult, causing delay in the initiation of proper therapy, sometimes late in the disease course.

The clinical presentation of fungal meningitis is less stereotyped than that of bacterial meningitis, with patients most often first seen with the chronic meningitis syndrome (21). Numerous fungal species have been reported to cause meningitis (Table 2). Clinical manifestations, methods for diagnosis, and treatment recommendations (Table 3) are discussed separately for the more common fungi that cause meningitis.

### *Cryptococcus neoformans*

*C. neoformans* is an encapsulated yeast-like fungus and is the only encapsulated yeast known to be pathogenic for humans. The cell is round or oval, usually 4–6  $\mu\text{m}$  in diameter (22). It reproduces by budding. *C. neoformans* is ubiquitous in nature and has been isolated from soil, pigeon excrement, and sites contaminated by pigeon or other avian excrement. Nonavian sources include fruits, vegetables, and dairy products (23,24).

Before the advent of the AIDS epidemic, cryptococcal meningitis was rare. Now *C. neoformans* is the most common fungal cause of clinically recognized meningitis; patients with AIDS constitute the highest risk group for cryptococcal meningitis (25–28). Whereas *Cryptococcus* is greatly increased in frequency in patients with defective cell-mediated immunity, before the AIDS epidemic, ~50% of all patients with cryptococcal infection had no readily identifiable underlying immune defect. Those who are also at risk include patients with a lymphoreticular malignancy (e.g., lymphoma), diabetes mellitus, chronic renal failure, collagen vascular diseases (e.g., systemic lupus erythematosus), and patients receiving organ transplants or immunosuppressive agents (29–31). Cryptococcal infection has been described in all age groups, but two thirds of patients are between the ages of 30 and 50 years (2).

The respiratory route is the usual means of primary infection, which can be followed by disseminated disease (32). Meningitis is the most common form of CNS disease caused by *C. neoformans*, but the organism may also cause brain abscesses and granulomas, either alone or in association with meningitis.

TABLE 2. Fungal pathogens that may cause meningitis

<i>Aspergillus</i> species
<i>Blastomyces dermatitidis</i>
<i>Candida</i> species
<i>Cladosporium</i> species
<i>Coccidioides immitis</i>
<i>Cryptococcus neoformans</i>
Dematiaceous fungi
<i>Histoplasma capsulatum</i>
<i>Paracoccidioides brasiliensis</i>
<i>Pseudallescheria boydii</i>
<i>Sporothrix schenckii</i>
<i>Zygomycetes</i> species

### Fungus

*Cryptococcus neoformans*  
*Coccidioides immitis*  
*Candida* species  
*Histoplasma capsulatum*  
*Blastomyces dermatitidis*

<sup>a</sup> Monitor serum copper

<sup>b</sup> Effectiveness of treatment

<sup>c</sup> Intravenous and intrathecal

Cryptococcal meningitis in patients (24–30), meningeal signs, and specific presentation findings may be seen in ~40% of patients. Findings include papilledema (34).

CSF findings include lymphocytic pleocytosis, elevated protein, and low glucose. In AIDS patients, CSF glucose is low (65% of patients). CSF protein is elevated (in two thirds of patients). CSF lactate is usually elevated. AI (35). The yield of CSF culture in non-AIDS and AIDS patients is high, which is positive in 90% of patients. Increases up to 10% in culture.

Several serologic tests, including latex agglutination (36,37). A presumptive titer  $\geq 1:8$ . Serum titers are particularly in serology (27), although the screen patients with CSF. In normal hosts, titers are lower than CSF. In early infection, the prozone phenomenon may occur, usually in the presence of a vascular disease or polysaccharide antigen.

Prognosis of cryptococcal meningitis is good as well.

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less stereotyped than that of seen with the chronic meningitis. It has been reported to cause meningitis for diagnosis, and treatment for the more common fungi

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s and is the only encapsulated organism. It is round or oval, usually 4–6  $\mu$ m. *C. neoformans* is ubiquitous in the environment, and sites contaminated include fruits, vegetables,

cryptococcal meningitis was rare. Because of clinically recognized high-risk group for cryptococcal meningitis, it has increased in frequency in the AIDS epidemic, ~50% of patients with a lymphoreticular disease, chronic renal failure, collagen disease, and patients receiving corticosteroids (31). Cryptococcal infection in patients are between the

primary infection, which can be the most common form of meningitis. The organism may also cause brain abscesses and meningitis.

at may

TABLE 3. Specific antifungal therapy for meningitis

Fungus	Standard therapy	Alternative therapies
<i>Cryptococcus neoformans</i>	Amphotericin B $\pm$ flucytosine <sup>a</sup>	Fluconazole, itraconazole <sup>b</sup>
<i>Coccidioides immitis</i>	Amphotericin B <sup>c</sup>	Fluconazole, itraconazole <sup>b</sup>
<i>Candida</i> species	Amphotericin B $\pm$ flucytosine <sup>a</sup>	Fluconazole <sup>b</sup>
<i>Histoplasma capsulatum</i>	Amphotericin B	Itraconazole <sup>b</sup> , fluconazole <sup>b</sup>
<i>Blastomyces dermatitidis</i>	Amphotericin B	

<sup>a</sup> Monitor serum concentrations and maintain at 50–100  $\mu$ g/ml.

<sup>b</sup> Effectiveness of this agent has not been established.

<sup>c</sup> Intravenous and intrathecal administration.

Cryptococcal meningitis occurs differently in non-AIDS patients and AIDS patients (24–30,33). In non-AIDS patients, headache, nausea, vomiting, meningeal signs, and mental-status changes are common as opposed to a nonspecific presentation with minimal findings in patients with AIDS; the only clinical findings may be headache, fever, and lethargy. Ocular abnormalities (seen in ~40% of patients) associated with raised intracranial pressure may occur and include papilledema, cranial nerve palsies, blind spots, and reduced visual acuity (34).

CSF findings in most non-AIDS patients show a pleocytosis, predominately lymphocytic, elevated protein concentration, and often reduced glucose (30,31). AIDS patients, on the other hand, may have low CSF white blood cell counts (65% of patients have  $<5$  white blood cells/mm<sup>3</sup>) and a normal glucose concentration (in two thirds of cases) (27,30,33). The CSF protein concentration is usually elevated. AIDS patients with completely normal CSF have been reported (35). The yield of CSF culture for isolation of *C. neoformans* is excellent in both non-AIDS and AIDS patients. India ink examination is a rapid, effective test, which is positive in 50–75% of patients with cryptococcal meningitis (this yield increases up to 88% in AIDS patients), but should always be confirmed with culture.

Several serologic tests for cryptococcal disease exist, but the most useful is the latex agglutination test for the detection of cryptococcal polysaccharide antigen (36,37). A presumptive diagnosis of cryptococcal meningitis is indicated by a CSF titer  $\geq 1:8$ . Serum cryptococcal polysaccharide antigen may also be detected, particularly in severely immunocompromised patients (i.e., those with AIDS) (27), although the value of the serum cryptococcal polysaccharide antigen to screen patients suspected of having meningeal disease has not been established. In normal hosts with cryptococcal meningitis, serum titers are usually negative or are lower than CSF titers. False-negative tests are unusual but may be negative in early infection when the CSF burden of *Cryptococcus* is low or secondary to a prozone phenomenon from antigen excess. A small number of false positives do occur, usually in the presence of rheumatoid factor, malignancy, or collagen vascular disease. The overall sensitivity and specificity of the cryptococcal polysaccharide antigen test are close to 100% (38).

Prognosis of cryptococcal infection depends on the underlying predisposing condition as well as the severity of disease at the time of diagnosis. In non-HIV-

infected individuals, prognostic factors have been clearly delineated. Poor prognostic indicators include an initial positive CSF India ink test, an elevated opening pressure, an initial CSF white blood cell count of  $<20/\text{mm}^3$ , culture of *C. neoformans* from any extraneural site, an initial cryptococcal antigen titer  $\geq 1:32$  in CSF, and the coexistence of corticosteroid use or hematologic malignancy (21, 28, 29). Patients were more likely to relapse after treatment if they had one or more of the following: a CSF glucose concentration that remained abnormal during 4 or more weeks of therapy, low initial CSF white blood cell counts ( $<20/\text{mm}^3$ ), cryptococci isolated from extraneural sites, absent anticryptococcal antibody, post-treatment CSF or serum titer  $\geq 1:8$ , no significant decrease in CSF or serum antigen titers during therapy, or daily corticosteroid therapy (equivalent to 20 mg of prednisone or more) after completion of therapy (29). In HIV-infected patients, poor prognostic signs include high antigen titers in CSF ( $>1:10,000$ ), altered mental status, and abnormal computed tomography (CT) of the head (26).

Before the clinical availability of amphotericin B, cryptococcal meningitis was nearly always fatal. With its introduction, prognosis improved, although relapse rates remained high, especially in immunocompromised patients (cure rates  $\leq 52\%$  after the first course of therapy) (30). Once it was demonstrated that amphotericin B had in vitro synergistic activity with flucytosine, trials with amphotericin B in combination with flucytosine compared to amphotericin B alone were done. A large prospective collaborative trial compared combination therapy with amphotericin B (0.3 mg/kg/day) plus flucytosine (150 mg/kg/day) for 6 weeks to amphotericin B (0.4 mg/kg/day) alone for 10 weeks in patients with cryptococcal meningitis (39). Combination therapy produced fewer failures, fewer relapses, more rapid sterilization of CSF, and decreased nephrotoxicity; cure or improvement occurred in 67% of patients receiving combination therapy versus 41% of patients receiving amphotericin B alone. Mortality rates in the two groups were not statistically different. However, this trial has been criticized because of the low dose of amphotericin B used in the single-agent arm of the study.

A subsequent study of the therapy of cryptococcal meningitis compared a 4-week to a 6-week regimen of amphotericin B plus flucytosine (40). The study demonstrated that a 4-week regimen could be used in the subset of patients who at presentation had no neurologic complications, no underlying diseases, no immunosuppressive therapy, a pretreatment CSF white blood cell count  $>20/\text{mm}^3$ , and a serum cryptococcal polysaccharide antigen titer  $<1:32$ ; and at 4 weeks had a negative CSF India ink and a CSF cryptococcal polysaccharide antigen titer  $<1:8$ . However, patients treated with combination therapy were noted to have a high rate of toxicity related to therapy with flucytosine (38% of cases) (10), mainly hematologic, indicating the need to monitor serum concentrations (see previous sections).

In AIDS patients with cryptococcal meningitis, therapy initially consisted of standard antifungal therapy. In a retrospective analysis of AIDS patients with cryptococcal meningitis (27), no differences in survival were noted whether patients were treated with amphotericin B alone or amphotericin B plus flucytosine. However, in  $>50\%$  of the patients receiving flucytosine, therapy had to be discontinued because of toxicity, primarily cytopenias.

Because of poor cryptococcal men primarily with the excellent CSF per enthusiasm was b cent studies in AI gal therapy. In the tericin B (0.7 mg/ patients receiving ceiving amphoteric and mycologic dose followed by cryptococcal men found in the num fatality rates, but patients treated w it appeared that primary treatment out certain negat *neoformans*, CSF dia ink smear, or because the drug for optimal therap cryptococcal men initial use of am weeks; this period Patients should t course. Pending should continue t for 4–6 weeks (se

Another conce completion of the tion appears to be (46,47). This supp resive therapy has been associa maintenance ther protection agains studies have exar coccal meningitis that the rate of re therapy (3 vs. 37 fluconazole (200 fluconazole was tericin B) (51). T agent of choice

clearly delineated. Poor prognosis was indicated by a positive ink test, an elevated opening pressure ( $>20/\text{mm}^3$ ), culture of *C. neoformans*, cryptococcal antigen titer  $\geq 1:32$  in CSF, or hematologic malignancy (21). Patients were treated if they had one or more of these findings remained abnormal during 4 or more follow-up cell counts ( $<20/\text{mm}^3$ ), cryptococcal antibody, post-treatment decrease in CSF or serum cryptococcal antigen therapy (equivalent to 20 mg of fluconazole daily for 29). In HIV-infected patients, CSF ( $>1:10,000$ ), altered mentation, or enlargement of the head (26).

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therapy initially consisted of analysis of AIDS patients with survival were noted whether paphotericin B plus flucytosine. osine, therapy had to be dis-

Because of poor response to amphotericin B therapy in AIDS patients with cryptococcal meningitis, there is a search for alternative therapeutic options, primarily with the azole antifungal agents. Fluconazole, with its long half-life and excellent CSF penetration, appeared to be a very promising agent, although initial enthusiasm was based on small, uncontrolled studies (41,42). However, two recent studies in AIDS patients compared fluconazole therapy to standard antifungal therapy. In the first trial, fluconazole (400 mg/day) was compared to amphotericin B (0.7 mg/kg/day) plus flucytosine (150 mg/kg/day) (43). Eight of the 14 patients receiving fluconazole failed therapy versus none of the six patients receiving amphotericin B plus flucytosine; combination therapy had superior clinical and mycologic efficacy. A second study compared fluconazole (400-mg initial dose followed by 200 mg/day) to amphotericin B alone (at least 0.3 mg/kg/day) for cryptococcal meningitis in AIDS patients (44). No significant differences were found in the number of patients who were cured or improved or in overall case fatality rates, but there was a trend to early mortality (within the first 2 weeks) in patients treated with fluconazole. In addition, in a post hoc analysis of the data, it appeared that fluconazole was an effective alternative to amphotericin B as primary treatment in AIDS patients with cryptococcal meningitis who were without certain negative prognostic signs such as a positive blood culture for *C. neoformans*, CSF cryptococcal polysaccharide antigen titer >1:128, positive India ink smear, or altered mentation (45). However, this study has been criticized because the drug dosages used in both arms of the study may have been too low for optimal therapy of cryptococcal meningitis. Although the optimal therapy of cryptococcal meningitis in AIDS patients is unknown, these data support the initial use of amphotericin B, with or without flucytosine, for a period of ~2 weeks; this period may need to be prolonged in patients who are severely ill. Patients should then receive fluconazole (400 mg/day) to complete a 10-week course. Pending further data, non-AIDS patients with cryptococcal meningitis should continue to receive standard therapy with amphotericin B plus flucytosine for 4–6 weeks (see previous sections).

Another concern in AIDS patients with cryptococcal meningitis is relapse after completion of therapy. An important reservoir for recurrent cryptococcal infection appears to be the prostate gland, even after effective therapy for meningitis (46,47). This supports the need for chronic suppressive therapy. Long-term suppressive therapy in AIDS patients using either ketoconazole or amphotericin B has been associated with improved survival (238 vs. 141 days) (27), although maintenance therapy with amphotericin B (50–100 mg/weekly) does not guarantee protection against relapse of cryptococcosis in patients with AIDS (48). Several studies have examined the utility of fluconazole for preventing relapse of cryptococcal meningitis in patients with AIDS (49). A placebo-controlled trial showed that the rate of relapse was markedly diminished in patients receiving suppressive therapy (3 vs. 37% in patients using placebo) (50). A subsequent trial compared fluconazole (200 mg/day) to amphotericin B (1 mg/kg/week) and revealed that fluconazole was superior (relapse rate of 2 vs. 18% in patients receiving amphotericin B) (51). These data indicate that fluconazole (200 mg/day) is the antifungal agent of choice to prevent relapse of cryptococcal meningitis in patients with



fe. Maintenance therapy with

l in the mycelial phase (52). It the southwest portion of the (Texas) and regions of Mexico, areas of highest endemicity are southern Arizona.

mitis arthroconidia (56); per- conidia swell and form large- spherule produces up to 800 sed on rupture, forming new s in ~0.5% of cases (53,57), . Of the patients who develop ningeal involvement. Dissem- male gender, non-Caucasian pulmonary coccidioidomycoperson with evidence of HIV

itis usually is seen within 6 acutely or almost coincident involvement are the basilar st common symptom is head- on, seizures, diplopia, ataxia, s of meningeal irritation are up to one third of cases.

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coccidioidomycosis remains the acts immunoglobulin G (IgG). d disease (53,57); however, serum CFA titers when other n at least 70% of patients with progression. In patients with ear to parallel the course of basis for both diagnosis and omplement in the absence of tive complement-fixation re- to develop in serum or CSF

or the last 35 years has been d intrathecally (52,54,57), al-

though the optimal intrathecal route and dose have not been determined. Intrathecal administration can occur via lumbar, cisternal, or ventricular (i.e., through an Ommaya reservoir) routes. The usual intrathecal dosage is 0.5 mg three times/week for a total dose of 20–25 mg; dosages of 1.0–1.5 mg can be used if combined with hydrocortisone. Intrathecal corticosteroids are commonly administered simultaneously to reduce local reactions. However, intrathecal amphotericin B is poorly tolerated, often leading to arachnoiditis. Intravenous amphotericin B therapy is administered, as a prophylactic treatment, against other occult disseminated foci; a systemic course of ~0.5–1.0 g is commonly given. Recommendations for duration of therapy vary. Once the initial intrathecal therapy, as outlined previously, is given, it is tapered to once every 6 weeks. When it is established that the CSF is normal for at least 1 year on this regimen, therapy is discontinued. Close follow-up of CSF is required approximately every 6 weeks for at least 2 years. If a clinical relapse or marked CSF abnormalities recur, the patient should be retreated. Mortality rates in coccidioid meningitis of 50% have been reported (52,57), although one study documented a survival rate of 91% over a follow-up of 75 months if larger doses of intrathecal amphotericin B (1.0–1.5 mg) were used (59). Patients are considered cured only after they have survived for >5–8 years without relapse. An unfavorable outcome is associated with hydrocephalus, an underlying disease, and non-Caucasian race. Low or absent CFA titers in CSF at the end of therapy suggest a favorable outcome (57).

Because of the difficulty and toxicity associated with amphotericin B, the azole antifungals are being studied. Both fluconazole and itraconazole have been used for the treatment of coccidioid meningitis. Although initial results appeared promising, most patients were treated previously or concurrently with amphotericin B. Recently, data have accumulated on the use of fluconazole in the treatment of coccidioid meningitis. In one study (60), 50 consecutive patients with active coccidioid meningitis (including nine HIV-infected patients) were treated with fluconazole (400 mg daily) for up to 4 years (median, 37 months) in responding patients. Of the 47 evaluable patients, 37 responded to treatment, most improving within 4–8 months of drug initiation. Despite the absence of symptoms, 24% of patients exhibited a persistent CSF pleocytosis, indicating the need for careful follow-up. The authors suggested that nonresponding patients should be treated with intrathecal amphotericin B or with increasing doses of fluconazole. In responding patients, therapy may need to be continued indefinitely. A large study is currently under way, using higher doses of fluconazole (800 mg daily), in the therapy of coccidioid meningitis.

Itraconazole has also shown promise in the treatment of coccidioid meningitis (61). Despite lower CSF penetration than fluconazole, itraconazole doses of 300–400 mg daily have shown a positive effect. Given the small study groups and that most of the data available are from patients treated previously or concurrently with amphotericin B, further comparative trials are needed before recommendations can be made. However, it is likely that the azoles will need to be given indefinitely because preliminary data indicate that relapses do occur after cessation of therapy. In HIV-infected patients with coccidioid meningitis, no antifungal regimen has been proven superior. For now, a reasonable approach would be

to treat initially with amphotericin B, followed by chronic suppressive therapy with an effective azole agent.

### *Candida* Species

*Candida* organisms are ~4–6  $\mu\text{m}$ , thin-walled, ovoid organisms that reproduce in the yeast form, whereas pseudohyphae or hyphae are frequently found in infected tissue (62). Tissue invasion usually occurs in patients with altered host defenses or immunodeficiencies such as those with hematologic malignancy, neutropenia, diabetes mellitus, and in those receiving corticosteroid therapy, broad-spectrum antimicrobials, or hyperalimentation (62,63). There are >150 species of *Candida*, but only 10 are regarded as important pathogens for humans. *C. albicans* is the species most commonly isolated in CNS disease.

The CNS is frequently involved in patients with disseminated candidiasis; many reviews have reported CNS involvement to be ~50%. *Candida* infects both parenchymal brain tissue and the meninges; parenchymal lesions are usually in the form of multiple cerebral microabscesses. *Candida* meningitis is uncommon, occurring in <15% of patients with CNS candidiasis (64–66). Candidal meningitis mimics bacterial meningitis with fever and signs of meningeal irritation; nuchal rigidity, headache, and photophobia are often found.

The meningeal form of disease is often easier to diagnose than the other forms of CNS candidiasis, which often require a high degree of clinical suspicion. The CSF findings in candidal meningitis include a pleocytosis (mean, 600 cells/mm<sup>3</sup>) with polymorphonuclear leukocyte predominance (64,65). Smears and cultures are very often positive. Recovery of *Candida* from other sites, including sputum, bone marrow, and pleural or peritoneal fluid, would suggest dissemination and possible CNS involvement. Serologic testing of both serum and CSF yield variable results and are not reliable.

The treatment of choice for *Candida* meningitis is amphotericin B with or without the addition of flucytosine (64,65). Some investigators recommend combination therapy based on more rapid CSF sterilization and possible reduction of long-term neurologic sequelae in newborns (2,67), although there are no studies comparing the efficacy of single-agent versus combination therapy. Amphotericin B at doses of 0.6 mg/kg/day are generally used. Cure rates have ranged from 71 to 100% in neonates and from 67 to 89% in adults with *Candida* meningitis, although sequelae have been observed in a high percentage of survivors (in surviving neonates, as many as 56% had psychomotor retardation and 50% had hydrocephalus). Increased mortality in adults has been associated with a delay of diagnosis from onset of symptoms of >2 weeks, a CSF glucose concentration <35 mg/dl, development of intracranial hypertension, and the presence of focal neurologic deficits. The role of azole antifungal agents (e.g., fluconazole) in the therapy of *Candida* meningitis remains to be defined.

### *Histoplasma capsulatum*

*H. capsulatum* is a typical dimorphic yeast, existing in a mycelial form at room temperature and as a yeast at 37°C. It has been isolated from soil of areas in which

it is endemic and oval, ~2–5  $\mu\text{m}$  in cells by narrow b Ohio, Mississippi, Lake Champlain r Carolina and Virg

Histoplasmosis those younger th often than females Most cases of hist of patients develo curs in >90% of H has been estimate tion (2), taking the mona.

The most com include headache, deficits (cranial n include paralysis, mon (~10% of ca

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Detection of sy *Histoplasma* men antibodies to *His* have been used fo are less specific, of cases (21). A detection of *Histo* (70,72–74); antige Serologic tests fo misleading, becau with disseminated diseases (due to c (70). Furthermore from histoplasmo patients with neu

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it is endemic and is highly concentrated in bird and bat feces. The yeast cells are oval, ~2-5  $\mu$ m in diameter, and have blastoconidia that are attached to the parent cells by narrow bases. *H. capsulatum* is endemic to river valleys, including the Ohio, Mississippi, and the St. Lawrence River valleys (68). It is also found in the Lake Champlain region, along the Appalachian Mountains, and in parts of North Carolina and Virginia.

Histoplasmosis may be acquired at any age, the highest incidence occurring in those younger than 3 years and older than 40 years, with males affected more often than females (68). Infection is established on inhalation of airborne spores. Most cases of histoplasmosis are limited to the lungs, although a small percentage of patients develop disseminated infection; dissemination of histoplasmosis occurs in >90% of HIV-infected patients (69). The incidence of CNS histoplasmosis has been estimated to be between 10 and 24% of all cases of disseminated infection (2), taking the form of meningitis, miliary granulomas, or a solitary histoplasma.

The most common clinical neurologic abnormalities of CNS histoplasmosis include headache, depressed level of consciousness, confusion, and cranial nerve deficits (cranial nerves III, VI, and VII) (1,70). Other focal neurologic deficits include paralysis, ataxia, clonus, and seizures. Meningismus is relatively uncommon (~10% of cases).

The CSF in patients with *Histoplasma* meningitis is usually clear with a white blood cell count not exceeding 300/mm<sup>3</sup>; either neutrophils or lymphocytes may predominate (1,70). The CSF protein concentration is generally elevated, and the glucose concentration is decreased (71). Yeast cells are rarely seen on staining of the CSF. Cultures of CSF are infrequently positive. In many cases, when multiple CSF samples are submitted, a single culture will be positive, emphasizing the importance of obtaining multiple specimens to exclude a diagnosis of *Histoplasma* meningitis. Large volumes (>10 ml) of CSF should be cultured on at least three separate occasions to increase the yield for isolation of fungi. However, up to 4 weeks may be required to identify *H. capsulatum* in positive cultures, delaying treatment in patients with more severe disease.

Detection of specific antibodies in the CSF has been used for diagnosis of *Histoplasma* meningitis because CSF culture is rarely positive (1,70). Detection of antibodies to *Histoplasma* by both complement-fixation and radioimmunoassay have been used for diagnosis. Although these tests have excellent sensitivity, they are less specific, and cross-reactions with other fungal pathogens occur in ~50% of cases (21). A more recent development in the diagnostic approach has been detection of *Histoplasma* polysaccharide antigen (HPA) in blood, CSF, and urine (70,72-74); antigen was detected in body fluids of >90% of cases that were tested. Serologic tests for anti-*H. capsulatum* antibodies may also be helpful but can be misleading, because these serologic tests may be negative in 10-25% of patients with disseminated histoplasmosis or falsely positive in patients with other fungal diseases (due to cross-reactivity with antigens shared with other fungal organisms) (70). Furthermore, antibody titers remain elevated for several years after recovery from histoplasmosis and may thus lead to a misdiagnosis of histoplasmosis in patients with neurologic illnesses caused by other diseases.

Treatment of disseminated histoplasmosis, including meningitis, has generally been with intravenous administration of amphotericin B in doses up to 0.7–1.0 mg/kg/day for a total dose of at least 30–35 mg/kg (1,21,70). Intrathecal or intraventricular administration has not been proven to be more efficacious. Fewer than 50% of patients with CNS histoplasmosis appear to be cured by antifungal therapy, compared to cure rates of 90% in patients with disseminated histoplasmosis not complicated by neurologic involvement.

With the AIDS epidemic, more experience has been gained in treating patients with disseminated histoplasmosis and CNS infection (75), especially with the azole antifungal agents. The concept of induction or primary therapy followed by maintenance therapy applies, as in cryptococcal meningitis (see the preceding), in chronically immunosuppressed patients. In patients with normal immune systems, careful long-term follow-up is required to identify those with relapsing infection.

As mentioned previously, amphotericin B is considered the mainstay in treatment of CNS histoplasmosis. In AIDS patients, in whom relapse is to be expected, the suggested dose is 1.0–1.5 g over 6–8 weeks, followed by maintenance therapy. Ketoconazole appears to have significant failure rates for CNS histoplasmosis, most likely attributable to low oral absorption and poor CNS penetration. Fluconazole, with its high concentrations in CSF, has been successful in at least one case of *Histoplasma* meningitis (76). Other experience with fluconazole given in doses of 100–400 mg has shown both failure and relapse in non-AIDS patients. Further studies for proper dosing for fluconazole therapy are under way. Experience with itraconazole (400 mg/day in two divided doses), on the other hand, has been encouraging for both induction and maintenance therapy and may protect against development of other serious fungal infections (77). Because of its variable absorption, serum concentrations of itraconazole should be measured (78).

Comparative trials of long-term treatment with amphotericin B and other antifungal agents will be necessary to define the best treatment and maintenance regimens in AIDS patients with *Histoplasma* meningitis. The preliminary results and favorable outcomes with itraconazole warrant further research.

### *Blastomyces dermatitidis*

*B. dermatitidis* is a dimorphic fungus found in soil that predominantly causes pulmonary infection. It is endemic to the Ohio, Mississippi, and St. Lawrence River valleys but does have world-wide distribution (79,80). In the environment, it grows as a mold and reproduces by conidia borne on the end of hyphal elements called conidiophores. The conidia or spores enter the body via the respiratory tract. *B. dermatitidis* exists in tissue as a thick-walled yeast 8–15  $\mu$ m in diameter. The yeast cells are multinucleate and reproduce by single buds with a broad base between parent and bud. Most cases occur in middle-aged persons, infections in men outnumber those in women, and there is no evident racial predilection.

Lung and skin are the most common sites of infection with *B. dermatitidis*. CNS infection is uncommon, manifesting as an abscess or meningitis. Meningitis is

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usually a late and fulminant complication of widely disseminated blastomycosis (2). CNS involvement is reported to occur in 3–10% of cases and is usually a result of hematogenous seeding from a pulmonary source (1,81), although direct extension may occur from bony lesions in the skull or spine.

The diagnosis of CNS blastomycosis is difficult (1,81). Evaluation of CSF usually is not diagnostic. The CSF may be clear or cloudy with a pleocytosis; CSF white blood cell counts up to 15,000/mm<sup>3</sup> have been reported. The protein concentration is often elevated, and the glucose concentration is either normal or decreased. Less than half of the smears are diagnostic. Only 20% of patients have positive CSF cultures. Culture of ventricular fluid may be required for isolation of the fungus (1,81). The diagnosis should be strongly suspected in patients with CNS disease who have evidence of blastomycotic infection elsewhere. The diagnosis can also be made by isolating the organism from biopsy specimens. No reliable serologic test has been established. Complement-fixation, immunodiffusion, and skin tests have been useful for epidemiologic assessments but not for clinical diagnosis (80). Cross-reactivity to antigens of various fungi severely limits the specificity of these assays.

The standard treatment of individuals with CNS involvement and life-threatening blastomycosis is amphotericin B (1,81). The exact dose and duration remain unclear, but good results have been noted with a total dose of 1.5–2.5 g of amphotericin B in doses of 0.3–0.6 mg/kg daily (not exceeding 50 mg). The utility of intrathecal amphotericin has not been established, and its use is controversial. The role of the azole antifungal agents in the therapy of CNS blastomycosis has not been adequately studied.

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## The American Investigator

The American Society of Neurologists in the 1980s as a group of researchers in the ASNI is organizing a training faculty year symposium, which will be a Canadian Neurological Association executive committee.

In 1992 I had the honor of being one of the speakers in the symposium in this new subspecialty of the readership of *Clinical Neuropharmacology*.